HONESTY ABOVE ALL ELSE? EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL CONDUCT IN THREE ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES

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ABSTRACT

Many citizens across the liberal democratic world are highly critical of their elected representatives' conduct. Drawing on original survey data from Britain, France and Germany, this paper offers a unique insight into prevailing attitudes across Europe's three largest democracies. It finds remarkable consistencies in the ethical priorities of British, French and German citizens: although there is some individual-level variation, respondents in all three countries overwhelmingly prioritise having honest representatives. It also finds differences in the types of behaviour that cause most concern in each country. The paper then examines how individuals' preferences shape their concerns about prevailing standards. The findings

are consistent with the idea that citizens' predispositions have an 'anchoring' effect on perceptions of political integrity. Finally, the paper considers whether established democracies are susceptible to an 'expectations gap' between citizens' expectations of conduct and what 'normal' politics can realistically deliver.

KEYWORDS: Anti-politics; corruption; misconduct; ethical attitudes; expectations

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Politicians have poor reputations for honesty and integrity across the liberal democratic world. In truth, politicians have always been viewed with suspicion by their fellow citizens; but recent years have witnessed growing levels of political disaffection, and established parties and politicians have borne the brunt of the opprobrium (Flinders, 2012; Hay, 2007; Norris, 1999, 2011; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Stoker, 2006; Torcal and Montero, 2006). Some degree of popular suspicion about the motives and morals of elected representatives is unavoidable, and is even desirable if it encourages citizens to monitor the behaviour of those in power. Yet many citizens are excessively cynical about politics and perceive exaggerated levels of misconduct and dishonesty (Flinders, 2012, pp. 14-15). As research shows, even though most citizens have no direct or unmediated experience of elite misconduct, many are quick to agree that corruption is prevalent (Allen and Birch, 2015; Klašnja at al., 2016). Similarly, even though research indicates that political parties implement the bulk of their manifesto pledges, the conventional wisdom is that they do not (Naurin, 2011; 2014; Royed, 1996). Regardless of their accuracy, corruption and integrity perceptions matter: they can affect turnout and vote choice, lead to diminished levels of political support and potentially distort the mechanisms of democratic accountability (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Birch, 2010; Birch and Allen, 2012; Bowler and Karp, 2004; Linde and Erlingsson, 2013; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2011). In an era in which so many publics seem to be gripped by a mood of 'anti-politics', it is not surprising that so much ink has been spilt trying to account for and address politicians' poor reputations (Corbett, 2015; Flinders, 2012; 2016; Riddell, 2011).

Our own contribution to this debate is prompted by recent work into how normative expectations affect citizens' satisfaction with public services and political institutions (Curtice and Heath, 2012; Flinders, 2012; Flinders and Dommett, 2013; James, 2009;

Kimball and Patterson, 1997; Seyd, 2015). The key insight from this body of work is simple: the reality of any service or interaction is more likely to disappoint those individuals who expected more in the first place. Despite the potential relevance for understanding contemporary attitudes towards politicians, surprisingly little attention has so far been paid to citizens' ethical priorities and how these might shape or exacerbate concerns about political misconduct. We seek to address this oversight by drawing on original survey data from Britain, France and Germany. Attitudes in Europe's three largest democracies are intrinsically interesting. They are also highly relevant given our broader concerns. All three countries have witnessed a heightened preoccupation with politicians' standards of conduct in recent years, yet all continue to score relatively well on major indicators of corruption, such as the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Bank's governance indicators. They thus typify the tendency for citizens in many societies to perceive endemic corruption when 'objective' indicators suggest a somewhat healthier condition.

The paper finds remarkable consistencies in the ethical priorities of British, French and German citizens: in all three countries respondents overwhelmingly prefer representatives who are honest versus representatives who are able to deliver the goods. And even though different types of behaviour cause most concern in each country, individuals' preferences are consistently related to their perceptions of conduct. In short, the findings are consistent with the idea that citizens' predispositions have an 'anchoring' effect on their perceptions of integrity in political life (James, 2009). When citizens prioritise honesty, they feel more aggrieved by perceived levels of wrongdoing. Thus, the paper corroborates arguments that established democracies are susceptible to a form of 'expectations gap' between citizens' high expectations of political conduct and what 'normal' politics can realistically deliver

(Flinders, 2012). Citizens understandably want their politicians to be honest and trustworthy. But democratic politics is an inherently messy business, requiring compromise, vagueness and position shifting (Runciman, 2008; 2013). As many writers have noted, from Aristotle through Machiavelli, complete honesty is sometimes incompatible with good government (Walzer, 1973). Moreover, politics is also a human business, and there will always be a few politicians who err. When citizens insist on honesty at all costs, disappointment and disaffection with politics is likely.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section discusses the relative importance of high ethical standards or honesty in political life, both in principle and as an aspiration or normative expectation in the minds of citizens. The third section provides an empirical analysis of citizens' ethical priorities in Britain, France and Germany. The fourth section examines the impact of citizens' priorities on popular perceptions of corrupt and other unethical behaviour. The concluding section considers the broader implications of citizens' expectations on contemporary levels of political disillusionment.

THE (RELATIVE) IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY IN POLITICAL LIFE

The expectation that politicians should be honest, in the general sense of being morally upright and adhering to high ethical standards, is an established feature of modern liberal democratic thought (Hampshire, 1978; Thompson, 1987; 1995; Warren, 2004).[1] It is also an established feature of liberal democratic practice, as reflected in national laws and institutional codes of conduct. Specific standards of conduct vary over time and space, as well as between different groups (Allen and Birch 2012; Atkinson and Bierling, 2005; Jackson and Smith, 1996; McAllister, 2000). Nevertheless, conduct that deviates from

established standards is generally thought to be a bad thing. Dishonest or unethical behaviour is something to be avoided.

Both general and specific expectations about the proper conduct of politicians constitute a normative framework that helps structure political competition. But expectations are also important as they exist in the minds of citizens: they serve as a subjective yardstick by which individuals judge politicians. For individuals who judge politicians by the most stringent standards, knowledge of even one transgression may lead to harsher judgements about the prevalence and seriousness of misconduct in politics. Among the citizenry as a whole, if expectations are 'continually frustrated', public confidence in the democratic system may be undermined (McAllister, 2000, p. 35).

Amid a rich literature on corruption and misconduct perceptions (Heidenheimer, 1970; Johnston, 1986; 1991; Jong-sung and Khagram, 2005; Lacsoumes, 2010; Mancuso et al., 1998; McAllister, 2000; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Redlawsk and McCann, 2005), the role that expectations play in shaping perceptions and evaluations of political conduct has received comparatively little attention. The omission is surprising. There are certainly good theoretical reasons for investigating how individuals' normative expectations affect responses to politicians' conduct—and for focusing on a relationship in which causality flows from the former the latter. Psychological research has demonstrated that the development of basic moral values, which long precede and influence the individual acts of evaluation that citizens make when judging political conduct, takes place in childhood and early adolescence (see, for example, Gibbs and Schnell, 1985; Kohlberg, 1984; Sniderman, 1975). Even recent 'online' models of cognition, which emphasise the split-second nature of reactions to political phenomena, recognise the importance of underlying values, beliefs and predispositions in

shaping ethical evaluations (see, for example, Lavine, 2002; Lieberman et al., 2003; Lodge and Taber, 2013).

Before we can examine how normative expectations might shape perceptions, it is first necessary to gauge citizens' ethical values and predispositions. This task is potentially complicated by the valenced nature of honesty and integrity. Virtually everyone who is asked can be expected to say that they want politicians to be honest.[2] In this paper, instead of focusing on the absolute value that citizens attach to ethical conduct, we examine its value relative to other desirable characteristics. We take our conceptual cues from those studies which argue that the qualities of elected representatives can be reduced to two dimensions: integrity and competence (Besley, 2005, p. 47; McCurley and Mondak, 1995; Mondak, 1995). Since democratic politics is ultimately a process for constructing and realising the collective good, politicians must also have the skills and capabilities to operate within this process and to make it work (Hay, 2007, p. 2). Most people, of course, want their politicians to score highly on both counts. As Jeffery Mondak (1995, p. 1045) puts it, 'we want representatives whom we can trust, and we want representatives who can get the job done.' Yet, not all citizens are likely to attach the same value to these two qualities. Some individuals may be willing to tolerate lower levels of honesty if it means their politicians are more effective; others may insist on having nothing less than the most morally upright politicians.

Evidence about the relative weight that citizens attach to honesty is mixed. Some research shows that elected representatives' integrity exerts a more powerful effect on vote choice than their competence (McCurley and Mondak, 1995). Yet other research shows that voters often compromise on honesty in practice, either because they receive particular benefits, are

predisposed to give fellow partisans the benefit of the doubt or simply lack information (Dimock and Jacobson, 1995; Rundquist et al., 1977; Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013). Indeed, there are many instances from across the democratic world of politicians prospering in the face of serious allegations of misconduct. So long as they deliver, or are simply 'liked' by enough people, their transgressions seem to go unpunished. As one study of a French political scientist notes, 'the citizen, by a kind of tacit symbolic complicity, sometimes keeps in office politicians suspected of, even indicted for, corruption' (Becquart-Leclercq, 1989, p. 191). Or, as John Zaller (1998, p. 188) observes in his reflections on the limited impact of Bill Clinton's affair with Monika Lewinsky, 'it seems unlikely that voter concern about character has ever been very great.'

At the same time, however, existing survey research would suggest that, when asked to choose between being represented by honest or effective politicians, most citizens in liberal democracies are likely to opt for the former. In one British study, for example, voters tended to say it was much more important to have honest politicians over 'successful and hard-working' representatives (Allen and Birch, 2011). Similarly, in successive surveys conducted for Britain's Committee on Standards in Public Life (2011), respondents who agreed that MPs and ministers should tell the truth consistently outnumbered those who said that these politicians 'should be competent at their jobs'. A recent French study reported a similar preference for honesty over competence: 70 per cent of survey respondents placed a premium on honesty compared with 41 per cent who picked competence (Mayer, 2010, p. 125). Although such responses to survey questions may not always correspond with voting behaviour, they nonetheless indicate citizens' self-perceptions and priorities regarding what they want from their politicians.

THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this section we focus on our measure of how much weight citizens attach to honesty in their politicians relative to competence. Our data come from surveys of British, German and French voters, providing an opportunity to compare citizens' ethical priorities across three countries with distinct political cultures and traditions. The first of these surveys was fielded in September 2009 as part of the British Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (BCCAP) and was conducted by the polling organisation YouGov. The second was also fielded in September 2009, this time as part of the German Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (DECCAP), and was conducted by YouGovPsychonomics. The third survey was fielded as part of the French Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (FRCCAP) in January 2013; for this survey, respondents were recruited by Survey Sampling International and redirected to a webpage administered by the Nuffield Centre for Experimental Social Sciences.[3] Further details are set out in the Appendix.

The relevant survey instrument was phrased as follows:

> People want competent and honest politicians, but they disagree over which trait is more important. Some people say that it is more important to have politicians who can deliver the goods for people, even if they aren't always very honest and trustworthy. Other people say that it's more important to have politicians who are very honest and trustworthy, even if they can't always deliver the goods. What do you think? Using the 0-10 scale below, where 0 means it's more important to have politicians who can deliver the goods and 10 means it's more important to have very honest and trustworthy politicians, where would you place yourself?[4]

The question required respondents to choose between two qualities couched in general terms. It may be the case that individuals are willing to make different trade-offs between distinct aspects of competence and discrete ethical attributes. However, whereas political theorists often have clearly specified ideas about the full range of attributes that might be thought appropriate to political life, most people are unlikely to have such well-formed ideas. Thus, while the phrases 'honest and trustworthy' and 'delivering the goods' are somewhat crude, they nonetheless capture the idea of a potential tension in political life between having honest politicians, on the one hand, and politicians who are adept at implementing or delivering preferred policies and outcomes, on the other.

Figure 1 reports the distributions of responses to this question. Generally speaking, British, French and German respondents were remarkably consistent in their tendency to prioritise honesty. The majority of respondents in all three countries located themselves towards the 'honest' end of the spectrum. Few respondents located themselves towards the 'deliver the goods' end.[5] The mean score on the 0-10 scale among British respondents was 6.9, as was the mean score among French respondents, whereas the mean score among Germans was only marginally greater at 7.0. British, French and German citizens were seemingly of one mind when it came to preferring honest politicians over those who could deliver the goods.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

However, as Figure 1 also shows, in all three countries there is significant variation at the individual level. In order to analyse the causes of this variation, Table 1 reports the results of a simple multivariate analysis in which the dependent variable is respondents' answer to the 'honesty or deliver the goods' question, as described above, where a higher score reflects a

greater attachment to honesty. Because this variable is measured on a 0-10 scale, we use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. The independent variables include demographic factors, namely age, gender, education and income, which are often associated with distinct ethical values. Previous research, for example, suggests that older people and women are more likely to condemn corrupt behaviour (Allen and Birch, 2012; Davis et al., 2004; Grødeland et al., 2000; Johnston, 1986; McManus-Czubińska et al., 2004; Mancuso et al., 1998), that graduates are likely to have lower expectations of politicians' standards of conduct (McAllister, 2000), and that those on higher levels of income are more likely to be damning of behaviour that involves rule-breaking (Jackson and Smith, 1996; Johnston, 1986; Redlawsk and McCann, 2005). The independent variables also include centre-right partisanship, as research indicates that party identification can affect tolerance of ethically dubious conduct (Atkinson and Bierling, 2005). In particular, evidence from Britain and France suggests that supporters of centre-right parties tend to be the most tolerant of ethically dubious behaviour by politicians (Allen and Birch, 2012; Muxel, 2010).[6] Full details of how we constructed the variables are set out in the Appendix.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The results, reported separately for each country as well as for all respondents in a 'pooled model', show some individual-level variation in respect of all these characteristics. Older respondents generally attached a greater relative value to honesty, whereas respondents who identified with a centre-right party—the British Conservatives, the French Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) or the German Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU)—were generally more willing to compromise on honesty. Although this last finding is in line with previous empirical research, the theoretical explanation remains unclear and deserves further inquiry.[7]

While the effects of age and identification with a centre-right party on perceptions of dishonesty are stable across the three countries, several other individual-level factors have a divergent effect. Gender was significant and negatively signed among British respondents, indicating a weaker commitment to honesty among men in Britain, while the income variables were significant and positively signed among French respondents, suggesting that wealthier citizens in France were more committed to honesty. Finally, being a graduate was significant and negatively signed in the German and pooled models. Since education was also negatively signed but imprecisely estimated in the British model, it would appear that exposure to university education has a distinctive association with ethical values in France. This suggests that, while perceptions of wrongdoing are similar in our three countries, at least some of the drivers of this vary.

DO PREFERENCES FRAME PERCEPTIONS OF WRONGDOING?

We now turn to the question of how citizens' priorities about honesty in politics shape their beliefs about and responses to actual conduct. Even though Britain, France and Germany score relatively well on major indicators of corruption, such as Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, our respondents in these three countries have been exposed to a wide range of political misconduct in recent years. Britain has witnessed numerous scandals involving parliamentarians and lobbyists, as well as widespread concerns about New Labour 'spin', while the Westminster Parliament's failure to regulate MPs' expenses brought virtually the whole political class into disrepute in 2009 (Heath, 2011). French democracy has been tarred by politicians' accumulation of elected posts (*cumul des mandats*) and the associated tendency towards clientelism and the misappropriation of public funds by local politicians; it has also been scandalised at times by amnesties for politicians caught up in corruption (Fay, 1995; Mény, 1996). German politics has also seen its fair share of alleged

financial impropriety, whether in respect of MPs' extra-parliamentary incomes or the award of *Länder* and local contracts, not to mention allegations of plagiarised doctoral theses (Saalfeld, 2000; Seibel, 1997; Scarrow, 2003). And the reputations of senior politicians in all three countries have been tarnished by numerous party funding scandals and dishonest and sometimes illegal attempts to raise campaign finance.[8]

There have thus been periods in these three countries when politicians' honesty, or lack thereof, has been subject to greater scrutiny and greater media coverage. It is likely that such events have influenced voters' perceptions of politicians' wrongdoing and levels of trust in political institutions. For example, in 2009, when our British survey was carried out, trust in Parliament was historically low almost certainly as a result of the expenses scandal that took place in that year (Baldini, 2015, pp. 543-544).[9] However, while the timing of our surveys is likely to influence levels of dissatisfaction or trust, it is unlikely that it would influence the fundamental relationship we are interested in, namely the anchoring effects of citizens' ethical preferences on their perceptions of integrity in political life.

Our basic proposition is that, holding constant the presence of misconduct, individuals who are less willing to trade honesty among their elected representatives against having effective politicians will perceive corruption and other types of dishonesty to be more problematic. Existing research has demonstrated that discrepancies between normative expectations and perceptions—or the confirmation or disconfirmation of what citizens think should happen—can affect evaluations of politicians (Seyd, 2015). But expectations may also exert a direct effect on evaluations. The basic logic underpinning this relationship stems from the way in which individuals' preferences or values act as an 'anchor' for their judgements (James, 2009; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Put simply, citizens who insist on higher ethical

standards in political life can be expected to be more disappointed with or concerned about what they perceive to be the reality than citizens with lower expectations.

To test this basic proposition, we first measured perceptions of a range of different behaviours in all three countries by posing the following questions:

> How much of a problem is the following behaviour by elected politicians in [Britain/France/Germany] today? Please use the 0-10 scale, where 0 mean it is not a problem at all and 10 means it is a very big problem.… [Not giving straight answers to questions] [Accepting bribes] [Misusing official expenses and allowances] [Making promises they know they can't keep].

The four types of behaviour cover a range of impropriety. At one end of the spectrum is bribery, which almost everyone would recognise as corruption. At the other end of the spectrum are politicians making false promises and failing to answer questions, acts of verbal dishonesty that often antagonise citizens but may nonetheless be regarded as part and parcel of political life. The misuse of official allowances and expenses arguably falls somewhere in the middle, since it may entail serious financial dishonesty but is generally less harmful to the integrity of political processes than bribery. It should also be noted that the question wording does not distinguish between the perceived prevalence of certain behaviours and how morally unacceptable they are; rather it explores the extent to which different types of 'dishonesty' are perceived to be problematic. Most people would probably find bribery to be more unacceptable than politicians not giving straight answers to questions; but most people would also probably believe the latter to be more prevalent than the former and thus, potentially, more problematic.

Figure 2 reports the mean scores in responses to each type of behaviour by country. Despite some striking similarities, there are some notable cross-national differences. Bribery was considered to be significantly more problematic in France than in Germany or Britain, where it was the least problematic of the behaviours, while the misuse of expenses was considered more problematic in Britain and France than in Germany. Types of behaviour involving verbal dishonesty, in terms of answering questions and giving straight answers, were seen as notably more problematic in Germany relative to behaviour involving financial dishonesty. To some extent, these responses reflect the nature of recent national scandals in the three countries, as noted above, although we might perhaps have expected more pronounced concerns with expenses in Britain. At any rate, these differences suggest that the measures are sensitive to national variations in perceptions of conduct and the salience of different ethical failings. At the same time, the survey items are also highly correlated, which suggests that, in addition to specific contextual factors, they are also picking up general dissatisfaction with ethical performance in each country.[10]

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Since we wish to investigate the relationship between respondents' willingness to compromise on politicians' honesty and their dissatisfaction with, or concern about, standards of conduct, we combine the four items into a single 0-10 scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81), which we use as a dependent variable in another simple multivariate analysis. Once again, we use OLS regression, and we also again report separate analyses for each country as well as for all respondents.

The key independent variable in all models is our measure of respondents' preference for honesty over competence. If preferences anchor perceptions in the way we anticipate, we would expect to find a significant positive relationship between respondents' expressed commitment to honesty and their concerns about ethical standards in political life.

As indicated in Table 1, preferences about honesty over competence are related to demographic factors that have all been shown to affect corruption perceptions (Davis et al., 2004; McAllister, 2000; Redlawsk and McCann, 2005). In order to disentangle these effects, our analyses control for age, gender, education and income. We also control for party identification, but this time coded on the basis of support for incumbent parties, who we assume will be held responsible for the ethical state of political life. In line with 'directional goals', government supporters are likely to be markedly less critical of politicians' ethical performance than supporters of opposition parties (Vivyan et al., 2012; Wagner et al., 2014). We further distinguish between those who identify with an opposition party and those who have no sense of party identification: partisanship is a psychological attachment that integrates citizens into politics, and any sense of identification may encourage citizens to be more sympathetic towards political elites and more willing, in general terms, to tolerate or even overlook their ethically dubious conduct (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Atkinson and Bierling, 2005; Vivyan et al., 2012; Wagner et al., 2014). Finally, our pooled model includes dummy variables for German and French respondents.

Table 2 reports the results of our analyses. There is a consistent and significant positive association between respondents' expressed preference for having honest representatives over competent politicians and their evaluations of conduct. The consistency of this finding provides support for our contention that ethical values play a role in framing perceptions of

actual conduct: those who attached a greater weight to honesty were likely to express higher levels of concern about conduct in practice. The association does not provide an absolutely conclusive answer to the question of causality; however, as noted earlier, there is considerable evidence from psychological research that the causal relationship flows mainly in the way we posit. High expectations almost certainly lead to greater disappointment in the face of any form of misdemeanour.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Of our control variables, age was consistently significant and positively associated with concerns about conduct: older respondents were more likely to perceive problems than younger respondents. Gender was also significant in the British, German and pooled models, suggesting that men were generally less concerned. Being a graduate failed to achieve conventional ($p < 0.05$) levels of significance, but the fact that it was negatively signed in the British, German and pooled models and positively signed in the French model suggests that, once again, tertiary education has a distinctive influence on ethical attitudes in France compared with in Britain and Germany. The two income variables were both negatively signed, but they were only significant in the pooled model, almost certainly a consequence of the larger combined sample. This finding suggests that in Western European democracies, citizens who enjoy higher incomes are generally less concerned by politicians' ethical performance.

Partisanship also generally behaved as expected: respondents who identified with an incumbent party were generally less concerned about politicians' conduct than supporters of opposition parties. The exception to this rule was Britain, where there was no significant

difference between governing- and opposition-party identifiers, but there was a significant difference between opposition partisans and individuals with no sense of identification. This difference is perhaps explained by the 2009 MPs' expenses scandal, which embroiled all the major parties and Westminster's whole political class. Finally, the country variables suggest that French citizens were generally more concerned about the ethical performance of their politicians than British and German citizens. While it is difficult, objectively speaking, to compare the severity of different national scandals, this last finding is consistent with recent Transparency International data: while all three countries generally scored well on these measures, France scored consistently scored worse than Britain and Germany in all the Corruption Perceptions Indices between 2009 and 2013.[11]

DISCUSSION: INEVITABLE DISAPPOINTMENT?

The empirical findings set out in this paper shed new light on citizens' ethical values in three major Western European liberal democracies and how such values influence evaluations of conduct. Citizens place an obvious and understandable premium on being represented by honest men and women. When forced to choose between having politicians who are honest and trustworthy or who are competent and can deliver the goods, respondents in Britain, France and Germany were consistent in their tendency to prioritise the former. Despite distinctive political traditions, ethical orientations in the three countries were markedly similar. Moreover, the premium that many citizens attached in general terms to honesty in political life were associated with their evaluations of political conduct. Citizens who were less willing to compromise on honesty were more likely to be concerned about a range of misbehaviour. Such a relationship is consistent with the anchoring effect of prior values and predispositions (James, 2009). From what we know of how expectations can shape responses

in other areas of social, economic and political life, it is not surprising that citizens who attach greater value to honesty in politics respond more critically to politicians' wrongdoing.

There are, of course, limits on what we are able to demonstrate in this paper given the coverage, detail and cross-sectional nature of our data. In terms of the value citizens attach to honesty, as well its effect on perceptions, it is unclear whether our findings from Britain, France and Germany can be generalised to other political systems, such as Southern Mediterranean or Eastern European democracies, with their distinctive political cultures and different experiences of corruption. There is no reason to assume that they cannot, but further research is clearly needed to ascertain whether citizens elsewhere have similar preferences. Additional research is also needed to explore in greater detail the nuances of citizens' ethical priorities. The dichotomy we employed between honesty and effectiveness was necessarily crude; more sensitive survey instruments are needed to shed further light on the ethical values of citizens across countries and the trade-offs they are prepared to make. Survey or lab experiments may be particularly well-suited to exploring when and why citizens are willing to compromise on honest means for desired ends. Finally, further research is also needed to explore how individuals' normative expectations change over time and how external factors might alter their ethical priorities. There is much to be investigated; our own findings merely constitute an initial foray.

Moving from the micro- to the macro-level and the paper's broader implications, our findings also speak to current concerns about levels of political disaffection and the need to pay more attention to prior expectations. Citizens' tendencies to demand the very highest standards of honesty and integrity in political life may help explain prevailing concerns about politicians' conduct in many liberal democracies, which, as noted at the outset, seem exaggerated in the

face of ‘objective’ measures of behaviour such as Transparency International figures. There are good reasons for thinking that expectations matter. As the results we present show, the higher the ethical bar is set, the more likely citizens are to feel outraged by the occasional instances of actual wrongdoing. Thus, even if levels of corruption or misconduct are generally low, just a few instances of wrongdoing may cause exaggerated levels of disappointment if citizens believe they should never occur. Similarly, even if governments tend to do what they say they will, one broken manifesto pledge may prompt excessive anger if citizens believe that politicians should always do everything they promise to.

Developing this last point a little further, our findings also highlight democratic politics’ susceptibility to what Matthew Flinders (2012) terms an ‘expectations gap’ in respect of political conduct and ethics. At its simplest, the idea of an expectations gap refers to an almost structural mismatch between what citizens think politics can and should deliver, and what normal politics can actually deliver. Gap analysis has been employed to make sense of public responses to various political institutions, processes and reforms (Dommett and Flinders, 2014; Flinders and Kelso, 2011; Flinders and Dommett, 2013). While the framework has its limitations (Corbett, 2016) it nonetheless raises important questions about the tendency of democratic politics to confound citizens’ preferences for the highest ethical standards. In particular, it obliges us to think about supply and demand within a political system, in this case the ‘supply’ that is political conduct and the ‘demand’ for honest politics.

In terms of supply and politicians’ conduct, there is clearly variation in levels of honesty and integrity over space and time. To take an extreme form of wrongdoing, the prevalence of bribery waxes and wanes, and some political systems are undoubtedly more conducive to its occurrence than others. As critics of Flinders note, any attempt to address citizens’

disaffection with politicians requires some engagement with supply-side factors (see Baldini, 2015), in this instance an effort to improve actual standards of honesty and integrity in political life. But even in the cleanest political systems, there are limits as to how honest politics can be. In the purely anticipatory sense of what politics can deliver, it is unrealistic to expect that politics will attract and recruit only angels and saints. In order to be elected and build coalitions, politicians must take positions and make pronouncements on a wide range of issues, and a certain amount of inconsistency, insincerity and even hypocrisy is likely (Runciman, 2008).

All of this begs an obvious question: do most citizens have unreasonably high expectations of honesty in politics? At risk of ducking the question, it is impossible to answer it one way or another without having more detailed evidence to draw upon. Nevertheless, we suspect that many citizens presently tend to have unrealistic expectations of what political conduct can be like. Democratic politics is unavoidably messy (Runciman, 2008; 2013). This then begs the further question of how might ethical expectations be managed? Again the answer is not immediately apparent. As more recent work on expectations notes, it is clear that politicians' 'capacity to manage expectations is limited' (Dommett and Flinders, 2014, p. 47). When it comes to ethical conduct, the mass media and its framing effects are just as difficult to manage in respect of demand as well as supply. Ironically, politicians in the present are also limited in their ability to manage expectations as a result of past efforts to improve actual conduct: the creation of ethics bodies such as Britain's Committee on Standards in Public Life have arguably institutionalised a concern with ethics and fuelled expectations in many places that complete integrity in public life should be the goal. Such bodies have an important role to play in highlighting the importance of ethical conduct. But they, and others, could also

play a more proactive educational role in establishing what democratic societies might reasonably and realistically expect from their politicians.

NOTES

[1] This claim does not deny that there are distinctive ethical demands associated with public leadership: politicians may sometimes need to manipulate others, break promises and lie if they are to provide the goods for those they represent (Thompson, 1987, p. 4).

[2] Alternatively, asking survey respondents how important it is that politicians behave in honest ways—for example, telling the truth or not taking bribes—also tends to return overwhelming majorities of people answering 'very important' or 'extremely important' (Seyd, 2015).

[3] Until recently, the use of on-line surveys has been clouded by concerns that they tend to over-represent citizens who are politically knowledgeable and engaged. A number of studies have assuaged many of these concerns. See Sanders et al., 2007, and Twyman, 2008.

[4] Native speakers assisted with translating this question, and others, into French and German.

[5] The bulge around the midpoint raises the spectre of 'the Problem of the Overstuffed Middle' (Converse, 1995, p. xv). Likert scales can encourage respondents to cluster around the middle, because they are genuine centrists, because they are ambivalent, or because they lack knowledge about the issues raised by the question. Our respondents were also presented with a 'don't know' category: 4.5 per cent of British respondents ticked this option, compared with 5.3 per cent of German respondents and 8.5 per cent of French respondents.

[6] We also recognise that prior perceptions of 'performance', whether in terms of politicians' ability to deliver the goods or their honesty, may affect responses. On the one hand, individuals dissatisfied with existing policy outputs or their material condition may be more willing to compromise on politicians' honesty. On the other hand, citizens who are generally unhappy with ethical standards may be less willing to compromise on honesty. We do not pursue these associations here since our theoretical focus is on how prior expectations frame citizens' ethical evaluations.

[7] One possible reason is that those who identify with centre-right parties are drawn disproportionately from the private sector, which may instil a distinctly relaxed approach to honesty. Another possible reason is that individuals with a right-wing disposition may have a more practical orientation and be more concerned with ends than means. Alternatively, those who are more concerned with ethical considerations may adjust their political attachments and move to the left. Unfortunately, our data prevent us from testing these explanations here.

[8] Notable examples include Britain's 2006 'loans for peerages affair' and the police's questioning of Tony Blair, France's 2010 Bettencourt affair and allegations of illegal cash payments to Nicolas Sarkozy and ministers in his government, and Germany's CDU party finance scandal, which cast a cloud over Helmut Kohl's earlier chancellorship.

[9] Eurobarometer surveys gauging trust in national parliaments, for example, show significant fluctuations over time in all three countries, with levels of trust being particularly low in Britain and France at the time our surveys were conducted (see Standard Eurobarometers 71 and 79 respectively). The data can be accessed and viewed on the European Commission's 'Public Opinion' website, http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/General/index (last accessed 31 March 2016).

[10] The correlations of responses are reported in the following table:

	Bribes	Expenses	Promises
How big a problem accepting bribes?			
How big a problem abusing expenses?	0.69**		
How big a problem making promises cannot keep?	0.45**	0.57**	
How big a problem giving straight answers?	0.34**	0.43**	0.61**

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

[11] This and other Transparency International data are available on the organisation's website, https://www.transparency.org (last accessed 31 March 2016).

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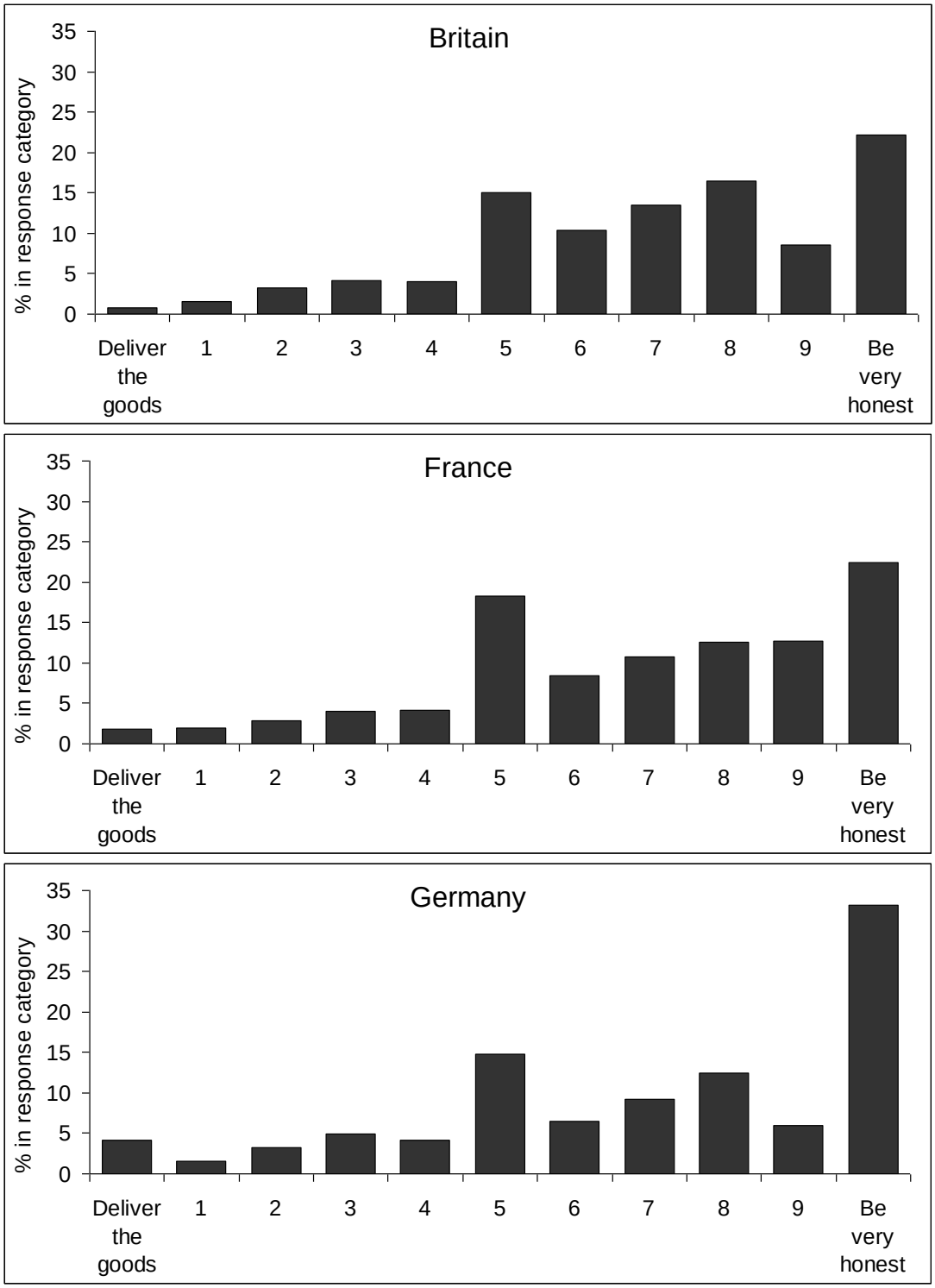
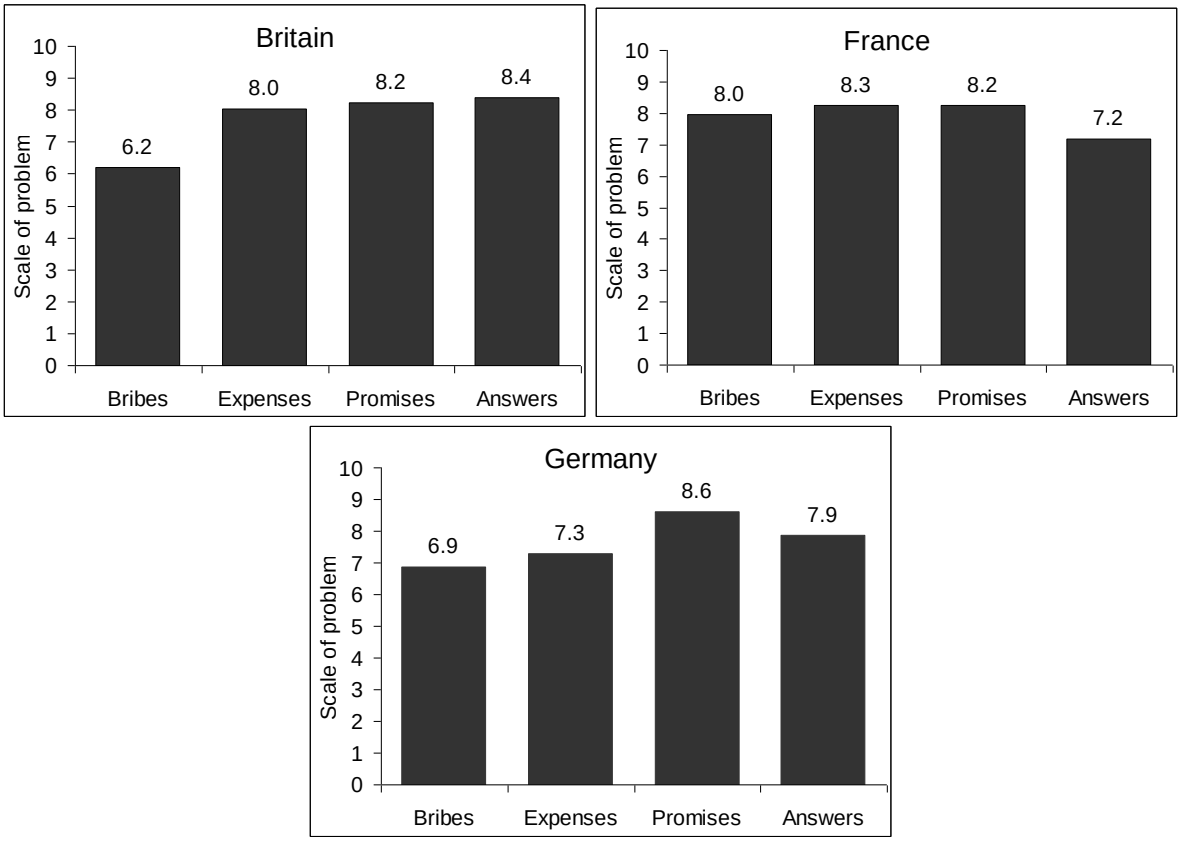
FIGURE 1: *Should politicians be able to deliver the goods or be very honest?*



Note: 'Don't knows' are excluded.

FIGURE 2: *Perceived extent of different problems involving elected politicians in Britain, Germany and France (mean score)*



Note: 'Don't knows' are excluded

TABLE 1: *Citizens' commitment to having honest politicians over politicians able to deliver the goods (OLS)*

	Britain	**France**	**Germany**	**Pooled data**
Age	0.05***	0.03***	0.05***	0.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender (male)	-0.40*	-0.23	0.17	-0.04
	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.14)	(0.10)
Education	-0.36	0.35	-0.48**	-0.28*
(graduate)	(0.24)	(0.25)	(0.16)	(0.11)
Income: middle	-0.12	0.61*	0.06	0.11
band	(0.26)	(0.29)	(0.21)	(0.14)
Income: upper	-0.44	0.75*	-0.37	-0.16
band	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.24)	(0.17)
Centre-right party	-0.46*	-0.60**	-0.59***	-0.55***
identifier	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.11)
France				-0.06
				(0.15)
Germany				0.14
				(0.13)
Constant	5.14***	5.07***	5.20***	5.13***
	(0.43)	(0.37)	(0.27)	(0.21)
Adj. r2	0.11	0.05	0.06	0.06
N	574	754	1,783	3111

Note: Standard errors in brackets. * $p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Reference categories: partisanship—no-party and other party identifiers; income—lower band; country—Britain.

TABLE 2: *Perceptions of problems involving elected politicians (OLS)*

	Britain	**France**	**Germany**	**Pooled data**
Honesty over	0.18***	0.18***	0.14***	0.16***
delivery	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Age	0.02*	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender (male)	-0.73***	-0.01	-0.42***	-0.36***
	(0.20)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.07)
Education	-0.45	0.17	-0.17	-0.16
(graduate)	(0.23)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.08)
Income: middle	-0.44	-0.12	-0.23	-0.24*
band	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.15)	(0.11)
Income: upper	-0.40	-0.15	-0.28	-0.25*
band	(0.32)	(0.22)	(0.17)	(0.12)
Governing party	-0.30	-0.58***	-0.36**	-0.41***
identifier	(0.22)	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.08)
No party identifier	0.61*	0.15	0.21	0.23*
	(0.30)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.10)
France				0.27*
				(0.12)
Germany				-0.05
				(0.10)
Constant	6.50***	5.92***	6.34***	6.21***
	(0.47)	(0.27)	(0.22)	(0.18)
Adj. r2	0.16	0.15	0.08	0.11
N	389	722	1664	2775

Note: Standard errors in brackets. * $p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Reference categories: partisanship—other party identifiers; income—lower band; country—Britain.

APPENDIX

The data employed here were collected as part of the British, French and German Cooperative Campaign Analysis Projects administered by Ray Duch at Nuffield College, Oxford.

BCCAP was a multi-wave panel study carried out over the internet with participants drawn from the adult British population in collaboration with YouGov. A baseline survey was fielded in December of 2008, with subsequent panel waves taking place at six-month intervals. Most of the data in this paper come from the third wave, fielded in September 2009, although the personal ethics questions were asked of respondents in the April 2009 wave. The number of respondents taking part in both waves was 809.

DECCAP was also a multi-wave panel study carried out over the internet with participants drawn from the adult German population in collaboration with YouGovPsychonomics. A baseline survey was fielded in June of 2009. Three subsequent panel waves took place, with the questions in this paper being fielded in the third wave in September 2009 before the Federal election. The respondents numbered 2,341 in total. All the survey items were translated by native German speakers and checked, via back-translation, by the researchers.

FRCCAP was a single survey administered online in January 2013. Respondents were recruited by Survey Sampling International (SSI) using a sample frame based on quotas for gender, age, education and region of residence. SSI rewards respondents in points, based on how long the survey takes, which they can then convert to vouchers of their choice. Respondents selected for the survey received non-specific email invites and were then redirected to a webpage administered by the Nuffield Centre for Experimental Social Sciences. The achieved sample was 1,073. All the survey items were translated by native speakers and checked, via back-translation, by the researchers.

Further details about the BCCAP and DECCAP samples can be found online at http://www.raymondduch.com/papers/Appendix_Duch_and_Tyran.pdf.

Dependent variables

NB All questions are provide in English

Honesty over delivery: This variable was constructed by reversing responses, still using a 0-10 scale, to the following question:

> People want competent and honest politicians, but they disagree over which trait is more important. Some people say that it is more important to have politicians who can deliver the goods for people, even if they aren't always very honest and trustworthy. Other people say that it's more important to have politicians who are very honest and trustworthy, even if they can't always deliver the goods. What do you think? Using the 0-10 scale below, where 0 means it's more important to have politicians who can deliver the goods and 10 means it's more important to have very honest and trustworthy politicians, where would you place yourself?
>
> 10 = most willing to compromise on honesty
> 0 = not at all willing to compromise on honesty.

'Accepting bribes', 'abusing expenses', 'empty promises' and 'straight answers': These variables were based on response to following questions:

> How much of a problem is the following behaviour by elected politicians in [Britain/France/Germany] today? Please use the 0-10 scale, where 0 mean it is not a problem at all and 10 means it is a very big problem.… [Not giving straight answers to questions] [Accepting bribes] [Misusing official expenses and allowances] [Making promises they know they can't keep].
>
> 10 = it is a very big problem
> 0 = it is a not a big problem.

Independent variables

Age: Age in years.

Gender (male): coded 0 = female, 1 = male.

Income: The BCCAP asked the following question: 'What is your gross household income?' The FRCCAP and DECCAP asked respondents to indicate their monthly net income. The BCCAP income measure was a 1-15 scale ranging from 'under £5,000 per year' to '£150,000 per year and over'; the FRCCAP income measure was a 1-11 scale ranging from 'less than €300 per month' to '€8,001 per month or more'; and the DECCAP income measure was a 1-8 scale ranging from 'less than €1,000 per month' to 'more than €4,000 per month'. Comparable dummy variables were constructed from these scales:

Income: lower band (1 = Less than £15,000 per year [gross] OR €1,000 per month [net])
Income: middle (1 = £15,000-£49,999 per year [gross] OR €1,000-€3,000 per month [net])
Income: upper band (1 = More than £50,000 per year [gross] OR €3,000 per month [net]).

Tertiary education: coded 0 = non-graduate, 1 = graduate.

Party identification: The BCCAP, FRCCAP and DECCAP fielded a standard question about partisanship e.g. 'Generally speaking do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?' Responses to these questions were used to create simple dummy variables, where 0 = no and 1 = yes, for the following objects of identification:

Centre-right parties: British Conservative Party; French Union for a Popular Movement; German Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union of Bavaria

Governing parties: British Labour Party; French Union for a Popular Movement; German Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union of Bavaria and Social Democratic Party

Opposition parties: British Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats and others; French Socialist Party, National Front and others; German Free Democrats, Greens, The Left and others

No party identification: none.